

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Avalanche Advisory

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This is John "Oly" Olson on this clear morning with the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, March 5th, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, March 5th. Thanks to Gene and the Snow Safety bunch on the Schweitzer Ski Patrol for their input and continued support. This advisory is sponsored by Idaho Parks and Recreation.

WEATHER

The weather continues to be spring like all across the forecast area. Cold, clear nights with valley fog is a great recipe for the production of surface hoar frost which is visible on all slopes early and the northerlies above 6000' all day. The probability of snow increases on Monday with cooler temps and a likelihood of snow to the higher valleys. Maybe the robins will become a little more subdued. Also the snow travelers will need to beware if this current crop of surface hoar is buried intact by this new system coming. Snotel sites across the IPNF confirm that generally speaking there is 6-7 feet of snow at 6000' and about 4' of snow at 5000'. Below that the pack goes away quickly making access to the high country difficult. Please remember to observe all road closures with soft surfaces. A few mud drivers can cause very expensive repairs. There is great Weather info posted at <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/otx/>.

Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk are rated as on all slopes as MODERATE above 6000' until a warming event occurs. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are **possible**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

The new snow from the last seven days was variable across the reporting area but in most places there was about 6" that sheared in facets on an ice layer. I was out at Schweitzer and confirmed a very similar situation that Gene and the crew at Schweitzer found. We've been lucky that we've been getting cold temps at night that continues to build a stronger snowpack. The wild card in all this is that the southern exposures are becoming faceted and a prolonged warm period or heavy rain could cause point release entraining large amounts of snow. So.... The word is out. Enjoy the fantastic spring conditions while you can because we may not have them for long. I bet the golf balls are burying deep in some of those soft fairways.

Terrain

Spatial variability is the watch word on the IPNF right now. Travel the exposures to get on the slopes when they are softening to corn snow but get off them before they turn into

dangerous slush.. Areas of wind loading will be more sensitive and there could be places where the avalanche hazard is pushing CONSIDERABLE due to thermal gain.

Cabinet Mountains are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5000 feet. Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees. Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Yesterday Kevin and Clint ventured up Lightning Cr. out of Clark Fork, ID and ended up at Round Top Mtn. There are still several weak layers on ice crusts. Their travels found a reactive layer down about 6" at 6000 feet on a NW aspect. There is another weak layer at about a foot down but not as reactive. Below that layer the snow was consolidated and quite stable. Kevin did relay that rapid warming through solar gain could push the hazard rating to considerable. South slopes had about 5' of snow and faceted.

Terrain

Areas of intense solar gain or in heavy rain will be more sensitive and there could be places where the avalanche hazard is pushing CONSIDERABLE in these conditions.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 6000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Carole and Dan were at 6000' also in the St. Regis Basin yesterday and found some of those warm sunny slopes. They found about 4' of snow on a southern exposure. They were able to produce a shear on a crust in faceted snow about 8" down. It is bonding, however, and going melt freeze in the current weather.

Terrain

Stay off steep slopes if you notice the temperature starting to rise and the snow getting very sloppy.

ST. JOE

Avalanche conditions for the St Joe are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 6000 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Ed was able to get up to Dismal Lake area up Bluff Cr. At 5800' on a NE exposure he found a weak layer about 3" down and the rest of the 4' of snow was much consolidated.

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, February 26th, 2010.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us

know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686. There will be avalanche awareness classes at Priest Lake 3/5, 6/10 and Wallace 3/12, 13/10. Contact Marc Hildesheim at Idaho Parks and Recreation at 208-769-1511 or go to their web site <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/> and follow the links.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend. But don't forget to have fun and be careful.